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House Ways & Means Committee

HB 57 Education – Maryland Civic Excellence Program – Established

Bill Hearing Date January 29, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Jennifer Hess, and I am a retired teacher and parent of two Montgomery County Public Schools graduates. I strongly support the Maryland Seal of Civic Excellence because our state should recognize students who demonstrate responsibility, initiative, and devotion to their communities through meaningful civic engagement.

In my experience, civic learning is most impactful when young people apply their knowledge beyond the classroom. As a member of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County's Civic Education Action Committee, I helped sponsor two student service learning projects to encourage civic engagement of young people. One project entailed high school and college students writing non-partisan get-out-the-vote postcards to voters in low-voter turnout precincts sharing why they think it is important to vote. The other was an after-school career exploration club for middle and high school students introducing them to jobs in public service including advocacy and election administration. Through this work, students develop essential civic skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, ethical decision-making, and respect for diverse perspectives.

Currently, too few students see civic engagement recognized as a core part of educational success. A graduation seal would signal that Maryland values service, participation, and leadership alongside academic achievement and career preparation.

This is an especially meaningful moment to establish the Seal as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Honoring students who actively live out the principles of responsibility, self-government, and commitment to the common good helps ensure that the next generation is prepared to sustain our democratic republic.

Please report favorably on HB 57.

Thank you.